



RESEARCH ARTICLE

« PASSING » IS INDEFENSIBLE IN AFRICANA SPACE

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ABSTRACT

Cet article explore la représentation et la condition des métis en Afrique dans la littérature négro-américaine. À travers une analyse historique, théorique et littéraire, nous examinons comment les écrivains et écrivaines noirs américains ont utilisé leur plume pour dépeindre les expériences complexes des métis en Afrique. L'article met en lumière les contextes historiques qui ont influencé ces représentations, les cadres théoriques qui sous-tendent ces œuvres, et les raisons de cette situation. Enfin, nous discutons de l'impact de ces représentations sur la société.

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INTRODUCTION

The rich and diverse African American literature has always been a space where marginalized voices seek to be heard. Among these voices, those of mixed-race people in Africa occupy a special place, as they navigate the intersection of multiple identities and oppressions. This article explores the condition of mixed-race people in Africa in African American literature, examining how writers address issues of race, ethnicity, class, and other forms of marginalization. We will analyze how these writers use their writing to deconstruct stereotypes, claim agency, and redefine dominant narratives.

Historical Context

History of the Mestizos in the World

Origins and Formation of the Mestizos: The Mestizos began to form as early as the first contacts between Europeans (primarily the French) and indigenous peoples in North America, in the early 17th century. Marriages between European settlers and Indigenous women were common, often seen as a solution to the economic and social needs of the settlers, such as the fur trade. The children of these unions formed a new community that was neither fully Indigenous nor fully European. In Canada, the Métis quickly developed a distinct culture that incorporated Indigenous and European elements, particularly languages, customs, and religious practices.

MÉTIS IN CANADA

The Métis in Canada, particularly those in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, are often associated with resistance to British colonial authorities and the defense of their rights as a distinct people. One of the most significant events in the history of the Métis in Canada is the Rebellion of 1885, led by Louis Riel, an iconic Métis leader. Riel fought for recognition of Métis rights and to preserve their land in the face of the expanding Canadian state.

Métis in the United States and Around the World: In the United States, the Métis presence is less centralized than in Canada, but Métis communities exist primarily in the Great Plains states, such as North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana. These communities have also been influenced by the fur trade and relationships with Indigenous peoples. Outside of North America, Métis communities also exist in other parts of the world. For example, in Latin America, there are mixed populations that are the result of mixing Indigenous peoples, Europeans, and sometimes Africans. However, the term "Métis" is less commonly used in this context and there are many other names depending on the region.

Métis Culture and Identity: The Métis have developed a hybrid culture, marked by traditions and customs from both Indigenous and European sources. The traditional language of the Métis in Canada is "Michif", a mixture of French and

Indigenous languages, although the latter is in decline. The Métis have always fought for their recognition as a distinct nation, with territorial, cultural and political rights. They are often considered an intermediate group, neither quite indigenous nor quite European.

History of the Métis in Africa: The history of the Métis in Africa is less well known than that of the Métis in North America, but it exists through several historical processes that have involved encounters between indigenous African populations and Europeans. These interactions took place in particular during the colonial period and through trade, particularly those related to slavery and the colonies.

Origins of the Métis in Africa: In Africa, miscegenation occurred mainly as a result of European exploration and colonization. The arrival of Europeans, particularly the Portuguese, French, British and Dutch, led to the formation of Métis communities in certain African colonies. In regions such as Angola, Mozambique, Senegal, or the Ivory Coast, unions between Europeans and local populations have led to the birth of new mixed-race communities.

The formation of these communities was influenced by several factors, including the slave trade, military presence, and direct colonization. These mixed-race children, often born from the union between European merchants, soldiers, or settlers and African women, constituted an intermediate population, often stigmatized and torn between European and African identities.

The Role of Mixed-Race People in Africa: Mestizo people in Africa played an important role in colonial history and in the establishment of the social systems of the colonies. Because of their European ancestry, they often occupied intermediate positions in the colonial social hierarchy, sometimes between Europeans and African populations. However, their social status remained ambiguous. They were often considered "secondary citizens" by Europeans, but enjoyed a better position than the local African populations. In regions such as the Cape in South Africa, Réunion, and the island of Madagascar, mixed-race people played a crucial role in colonial administration, trade, and in some cases, in the formation of distinct communities.

Mixed-race people in Contemporary Africa: Today, the descendants of mixed-race communities in Africa, although not always identified as such, continue to claim a hybrid identity in some regions. For example, in South Africa, some groups descended from colonial mixed-race people are called "Coloureds," and they have a distinct identity, although their status is sometimes ambiguous in relation to other racial groups in the country. Similarly, in the Indian Ocean islands, such as Réunion, the descendants of mixed-race people have an identity that is marked by strong ethnic diversity.

The Condition of Mixed-race People in Africa in Literature: The condition of mixed-race people in Africa has been a central theme in Negro-American literature. Writers such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin have used their works to explore the experiences of mixed-race people in Africa, highlighting their struggles and triumphs. Their works, such as Wright's *Native Son*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, have had a significant impact on literature and society.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of the Condition of the Coloured in Africa: Mestizaje and Hybrid Identity Theory: The condition of the Coloured in Africa can be analyzed through the theory of mestizaje and hybrid identity, an approach that allows us to understand the complex dynamics of identities created by the encounters between distinct cultures and social groups, particularly in colonial contexts. This theory is based on the idea that miscegenation is not simply a biological encounter between different racial groups, but that it generates social, political and cultural processes that shape hybrid identities, often ambiguous and marked by power relations.

Miscegenation as a product of the colonial order: Mixed race in Africa is largely a product of European colonization, where Europeans first established trading posts and then colonies, often by imposing hierarchical social and racial structures. In this context, Europeans sometimes united with local African populations, whether through extramarital relationships or because of the constraints of colonial administration. However, mixed race people have always been caught in an "in-between" situation, between Europeans and indigenous African peoples. Their condition has often been marked by racial and social tensions, their status being perceived as ambiguous within the hierarchical systems imposed by the colonizers.

In this dynamic, miscegenation was not only a biological phenomenon; it was also structured by the way in which the colonizers and the colonized perceived each other, by the social roles that were attributed to the mixed-race people, and by the power relations that characterized colonial societies. The mixed-race people, in Africa as elsewhere, were often seen as "bridges" between two worlds, but this role was never free of contradictions, injustices and exclusion, sometimes because of their African ancestry, sometimes because of their ambiguous social and racial status.

Hybrid identities and their social ambivalence: One of the characteristics of the condition of the mixed-race people in Africa is identity hybridity, a concept that allows us to analyze the complexity of mixed-race identities in a colonial context. According to Homi K. Bhabha, a postcolonial theorist, hybridity refers to the way in which cultural identities are transformed by contact with two or more cultures. In the case of African Mestizos, this hybridity has led to the formation of identities that are neither fully African nor fully European.

This situation produces what Bhabha calls a "third space", a cultural space where Mestizo individuals can develop unique practices, beliefs and forms of expression, but also, and often, face internal tensions related to their belonging. In Africa, Mestizos were often perceived by colonial societies as "undesirables" or "subalterns": neither fully accepted by Europeans, because of their African origins, nor fully integrated into African communities, where their European ancestry made them foreign. This has led to precarious living conditions, where Mestizos found themselves in a position of marginality, oscillating between different identities and forms of social recognition. The hybrid identity of African Mestizos has therefore often been experienced as a social ambivalence, where these individuals were both heirs of two cultures and products of unbalanced power relations.

"Coloniality" and the racial construction of Mestizos in Africa
The condition of Mestizos in Africa can also be explained by the concept of "coloniality", a notion introduced by Anibal Quijano that refers to the structures of domination and racialization that persist long after the formal end of colonization. Coloniality is not limited to the simple occupation of a territory, but continues through logics of power and racial classification that influence the way in which individuals are perceived and integrated into society. In Africa, Mestizos have been inscribed in racial systems that often placed them outside the dominant social categories. Due to colonization and related racial hierarchies, mixed-race people in Africa were defined along racial lines, often referred to as "coloureds" or "coloureds", as terms were used in contexts such as South Africa. These categories were constructed in a way that marginalized mixed-race individuals, both because of their African ancestry and because of their ambiguous position in relation to European colonial ideology. The process of "racialization" of mixed-race people, through practices of exclusion and segregation, contributed to the construction of their marginalized social status.

Strategies of emancipation and resistance: Despite their marginalization, mixed-race people in Africa sometimes found strategies to subvert colonial hierarchies. In some cases, they used their hybrid status to access intermediate social positions, using their access to European education, their family ties to colonial authorities, or their membership in an emerging middle class. However, these strategies were also limited by the constraints imposed by the colonial system, and the emancipation of the mixed-race people was often hampered by their systematic exclusion from both sides of the colonial hierarchy.

Explaining the condition of the mixed-race person in Africa: a highly difficult situation: Being mixed-race in Africa has historically been a complex and often difficult condition, marked by social and racial ambiguity that has generated many tensions and discriminations. This situation has its roots in colonial dynamics and in the racial social structures that were put in place by the European powers during their colonization of the continent. In many cases, the mixed-race people found themselves caught between two worlds, neither fully accepted by African societies nor fully integrated into European communities, which has led to profound social and racial marginalization. One of the main obstacles for mestizos in Africa was their ambiguous status within colonial hierarchies. Due to their European origins, mestizos were often perceived by Europeans as "undesirable" and were excluded from the colonial elite. At the same time, their European ancestry made them foreign in African societies, where they were considered "foreigners" or "colonials." Colonial social structures, based on race, contributed to their marginalization, confining them to spaces where they were stigmatized and unable to achieve the privileges associated with full European ancestry or full membership in the local ethnic group. This situation of double rejection constituted a psychological and social burden for many generations of mestizos, who had to navigate between two opposing identities. Furthermore, mestizaje in Africa was often seen as a symbol of colonial exploitation. Mixed-race people were the products of a process in which Europeans imposed their domination and African women were frequently the victims of unequal power relations. Consequently, being mixed-race in Africa sometimes involved a stigma linked to

the way in which these unions were perceived, notably as symbols of colonial oppression. This perception complicated the social recognition of mixed-race people, placing them in a position of marginalization and rejection within African society. Mixed-race people in Africa also faced internal discrimination, particularly in the French colonies where assimilation into European culture was often valued. While some mixed-race people were able to benefit from a European education and access administrative or commercial positions, these opportunities were limited and reserved for a very small mixed-race elite. However, most mixed-race people found themselves relegated to a situation of poverty, far from the privileges reserved for European settlers. Opportunities for social integration were therefore limited, and access to resources and basic rights was often more difficult than for other racial or ethnic groups. The difficulty of being of mixed race in Africa still persists in some regions today, albeit in a postcolonial context. In countries such as South Africa, people of mixed race, often referred to as "Coloureds", continue to be caught up in complex discussions around race, identity and social inequalities. Despite social and political changes, the question of belonging remains central for many people of mixed race, who must still navigate an environment marked by racial divisions inherited from the colonial past. The legacy of segregation and hierarchization of racial groups has left deep scars, and the full recognition of people of mixed race as a distinct and equal group remains a challenge.

Finally, the condition of people of mixed race in Africa has often been marked by a lack of representation in political and cultural discourses. Their history has been obscured, and their presence often minimized in official narratives of independence and decolonization. This invisibility has reinforced the difficulty for mixed-race people to claim their own identity, and their history has often been neglected in favor of other dominant narratives, whether those of the colonized peoples or the colonizers themselves. This lack of recognition reinforces the feeling of marginalization and makes it more difficult to assert a strong and recognized mixed-race identity. In conclusion, being mixed-race in Africa has been, and in some cases continues to be, an experience marked by marginalization, racial discrimination, social ambiguity, and historical invisibility. Far from being a simple biological encounter, mixed-race people have had profound implications for the construction of identities and social relationships, and the condition of mixed-race people in Africa is a reflection of these unequal power relations, which have marked colonial history and continue to influence postcolonial societies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the condition of mixed-race people in African-American literature is a complex subject deeply rooted in the racial, social, and historical dynamics specific to the United States. Mixed-race people, born of unions between African-Americans and Europeans, have often been confronted with a hybrid identity marked by marginalization, ambiguity, and rejection by both whites and blacks. In this literature, the quest for their own identity is a recurring theme, where mixed-race characters struggle to navigate between two worlds, often without being fully accepted in either. African-American authors, through stories of mixed-race people, highlight the internal tensions experienced by these individuals caught

between contradictory heritages, , as well as issues of colorism, racial hierarchy, and belonging. Figures such as those depicted in the works of William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, or Nella Larsen illustrate this quest for identity through mixed-race characters often caught in an existential dilemma, seeking to find their place in a society that confines them to strict and discriminatory racial categories. African-American literature therefore approaches miscegenation not only as a biological reality, but also as a social and psychological condition, with profound implications for the individual and their place in a world marked by racial oppression. By exploring the realities experienced by mixed-race people in this context, African-American writers highlight not only the difficulties linked to their condition, but also the richness and complexity of the racial and cultural identities that emerge from miscegenation. This reflection thus allows us to understand the multiple facets of the black experience in the United States and the impact of the historical past on the struggles for recognition, equality and self-affirmation.

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